

# Strategic Planning Process

**I**t did not begin with City Hall or with the business community. It began with the neighborhoods, and from that point forward, the creation of the Cincinnati Empowerment Zone was truly a neighborhood-driven process. As the process picked up steam along the way, other community partners came on board. By the time this plan was complete it had truly been embraced by the broader community. But first there were the neighborhoods.

## *The Initiating Group*

The Initiating Group for the Cincinnati Empowerment Zone application began with the efforts of Jerry Pryor, Chair of the Economic Development Committee of the Avondale Community Council (ACC). Upon hearing President Clinton's commitment to a new round of EZ designations in his 1998 State of the Union address, Mr. Pryor followed all federal information on the EZ program and first informed the City of the Round II designation process.

Using the Internet and phone contacts, ACC, with their own resources, obtained copies of successful Round I applications from other cities. The group also reviewed a copy of the Cincinnati's unsuccessful Round I EC application.

ACC next took the lead in establishing partnership with the City of Cincinnati and other neighborhoods. Contact was also made with elected officials at the local, state and federal levels to inform them of the intent of the neighborhoods to apply for Empowerment Zone designation. Several private sector organizations were also contacted.

The group began informal discussions with City staff and studied three decades of census data on Cincinnati neighborhoods to determine those that might qualify for inclusion in the Zone under the federal guidelines. ACC then approached fourteen eligible neighborhoods and invited them to join Avondale to apply for EZ designation. Nine communities contiguous to Avondale agreed to form the Empowerment Zone Planning Coalition.

These efforts were ratified by Cincinnati City Council on July 1, 1998, when it approved the general neighborhood areas within the City to be included in the EZ and directed City government to join forces with the residents and other key stakeholders across the region to obtain designation.

## *A Resolution of Support*

*Dear Mayor Qualls:*

*We, representing the neighborhoods listed below, have begun a coalition for the purpose of submitting an application to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to achieve the designation of an Empowerment Zone.*

- *Whereas this coalition has been formed by the neighborhoods listed below ourselves; and*
- *Whereas it is the goal of the coalition to assess the economic development needs of our communities and how best to utilize resources to address those needs; and*
- *Whereas this application process and the ultimate award of such an Empowerment Zone designation will serve the entire City of Cincinnati;*

*We, the Empowerment Zone Planning Coalition, respectfully request a resolution of support from the Council of the City of Cincinnati.*

*Regards,*

*Avondale Community Council  
Clifton Heights/Fairview Heights  
Community Council  
Corryville Community Council  
Evanston Community Council  
Mt. Auburn Community Council  
Over-the-Rhine Community Council  
Queensgate Community Council  
Walnut Hills Area Council  
West End Community Council*

*June 10, 1998*

***Choosing the Nominated Area***

The nominated area was ultimately chosen by the neighborhood Empowerment Zone Planning Coalition, based on extensive data provided by City staff. The Coalition began meeting weekly in May, along with the City's EZ Project Coordinator and other city staff, to examine census data, learn about programs and resources and gather information about successful Round I EZ communities.

As part of this process, the City developed five possible EZ configurations. Each met all HUD criteria, and each included census tracts from the nine neighborhoods that had chosen to become a part of the Coalition (14 neighborhoods had initially been invited to participate).

The Coalition reviewed these options and census data on poverty, home ownership, infant mortality, and educational attainment for each area. They also considered what they knew of the current condition of the neighborhoods—nearly ten years after the 1990 census data was collected. Each option required a trade-off. Since the Cincinnati EZ is limited to a population of 50,000, each census tract that was added meant others must be removed.

Ultimately, the City left it up to the Coalition to choose the EZ boundaries from one of the five options. By a vote of the chairs of the Community Councils, they chose the boundary included in the application. Although the City had initially recommended another option (see Controversial Topics), they supported the Coalition's choice, based on the following factors:

- The Zone clearly demonstrates pervasive poverty and other clear indicators of economic, social and physical distress (see Community Assessment).
- A geographically contiguous Zone would be created, which would have a positive impact on other census tracts and communities surrounding the Zone.
- The proposed Zone follows the corridor of the planned light rail system, scheduled to be implemented within the next 10 years.

- Along with development opportunities within the proposed Zone, the addition of three non-contiguous developable sites would assure maximum benefits to the entire City of Cincinnati.

***Selection of Developable Sites***

The staff of the Cincinnati Economic Development Department prepared information on potential developable sites. Approximately six sites were analyzed, using the following criteria (see Section 2, Developable Sites), which are summarized below:

1. Ownership—public ownership or ownership by entities that have a development relationship with the City.
2. Access to public transportation
3. Business or industrial zoning
4. Leveraging existing and proposed resource commitments
5. Connects Zone residents to the region

Three recommended sites were selected. These were reviewed by the neighborhood Empowerment Zone Planning Coalition, who concurred with the City's recommendation.

***Developing the Strategic Plan***

Unlike what may have occurred in other cities, community participation in the development of the Cincinnati Empowerment Zone Strategic Plan was not done through public hearings. Instead, Zone residents and organizations worked side-by-side with representatives of the broader to community to develop a vision, identify goals and prepare detailed programs. Most of the work was done in small groups, where participants could sit around a table and collaborate on innovative, but realistic solutions. At the final planning meeting, the committee work came together, and 150 Community Partners endorsed the efforts of the group.

***Role of the EZ Planning Coalition***

Although the majority of the work to develop the Cincinnati Empowerment Zone Strategic Plan took place through the multi-stakeholder

Community Partners Group, the neighborhood Empowerment Zone Planning Coalition did a great deal of up-front work. This provided a foundation for planning and assured active participation by neighborhood residents.

The Coalition analyzed data on needs, collected information on resources, researched model EZ programs and solicited ideas for EZ projects. They also assembled existing neighborhood plans, which are summarized in the Appendix of the application.

The Coalition also hosted two meetings of neighborhood residents to conduct a neighborhood SWOT analysis. Working in small groups, the 60-70 residents who attended each meeting first articulated and prioritized neighborhood needs. At the second meeting they identified assets and resources, both in the Zone and in the region, to help address the needs. The results of these meetings were provided to the Community Partners Group.

The Empowerment Zone Planning Coalition continued to meet weekly throughout the planning process to provide input from the nine Community Councils on matters such as the Zone boundaries, developable sites and the governance structure. The Coalition also reviewed and commented on the draft of the Strategic Plan.

### Community Partners Group

In August, 1998, a letter from Cincinnati City Manager John F. Shirey was sent to approximately 240 stakeholders inviting them to join with the nine neighborhoods to develop a strategic plan for the Cincinnati Empowerment Zone and commit resources for implementation of the plan. The list was compiled by City staff using names solicited from a wide variety of sources, including Zone Community Councils. The goal was to involve:

- Residents, organizations and business from the nine neighborhoods in the proposed designation area;
- Regional stakeholders who could bring resources to the table; and
- Individuals and representatives of organizations with expertise in the program

areas to be addressed by the Community Partners Group.

The strategic planning process was open to anyone who wished to participate, and was broadly advertised through press releases and active outreach to all major news media in the community. In addition, the Empowerment Zone Planning Coalition placed a notice of the EZ planning process in the *Cincinnati Herald*, the only minority newspaper in the Cincinnati area.

The City, in consultation with representatives of the EZ Planning Coalition, selected co-chairs for the Community Partners Group. There were two chairs—one representing the Zone neighborhoods and one from the broader community—for the overall Community Partners Group, and for each of the four working committees.

The Community Partners Group met over a series of four meetings. About 100 people attended each meeting, and the group was representative of the economic, racial and cultural diversity of the Empowerment Zone and the City of Cincinnati. The committee work groups that developed the vision, goals and programs included neighborhood residents and business leaders; owners of neighborhood business and bankers; leaders of CDCs and city officials.

A total of about 260 individuals participated throughout the planning process. Their names and affiliations are included in the Appendix. Of these, 68% were Zone residents or representatives of Zone businesses, employers or organizations. The following summarizes the stakeholder groups represented in the planning process:

#### *Affiliation of Planning Participants*

27%	Businesses
24%	Residents not affiliated with a specific organization
24%	Government elected officials and staff
11%	Financial institutions
10%	Non-profit organizations
4%	Communitywide institutions

***Roles of the Co-Chairs***

The overall Co-Chairs of the Community Partners Group were responsible for chairing plenary sessions and coordinating the group's effort to solicit local resource commitments. The Co-Chairs also helped to publicize the process and encourage broad community involvement by participating in media interviews.

The Committee Co-Chairs facilitated committee meetings and participated in committee work. They also played a lead role in soliciting local resource commitments.

***Role of Participants in Plan Development***

The role of the members of the Community Partners Group was to develop the Empowerment Zone strategic plan over a series of lengthy meetings. Great efforts were made to remove barriers to participation by all stakeholders, including Zone residents. All meetings were held in the early evening, at the Cincinnati Zoo Education Center, which is in the Zone and has free parking. Dinner was provided at each meeting.

The Community Partners began and ended their work as a full group. At their first meeting, they met in plenary session to hear a presentation on the economic and demographic profile of the Zone, City and region. The local public access television station broadcast this meeting to the community.

For a portion of the first meeting, and all of the second and third meetings, the participants met in small groups. Each participant had the option of participating in one of four working committees:

1. Economic and Workforce Development
2. Housing and Neighborhood Environment
3. Individual and Family Well-Being
4. Civic Infrastructure

Committees developed vision statements, goals and strategies. Subgroups of the committees detailed the programs, including projected outcomes, budgets and recommended partners.

At their final meeting, the Community Partners came together to review the committee work and proposed governing structure, and to endorse the plan. The process culminated with the signing of the "Declaration of Empowerment" and a round of applause for a job well done.

Following the last meeting, many of the Community Partners continued to contribute to the final product by fine-tuning programs and providing and soliciting resource commitments.

***Community Partners Group******Co-Chairs***

Jim King	Lynn Marmer
Executive Director	Group Vice President
Avondale/Walnut Hills	The Kroger Company
Redevelopment Group	

***Committee Co-Chairs******Economic & Workforce Development***

Jerry Pryor	Nancy Schellhaus
Chair, Economic Dev.	President
Committee, Avondale	Promark Company of
Community Council	Partners

***Housing & Neighborhood Environment***

T. Clyde Nowlin	Deborah Jimmerson
President	Executive Director
Corryville Community	Greater Cincinnati
Council	Housing Alliance

***Individual & Family Well-Being***

Theresa Brundage	Neil F. Tilow
Assistant Director	President
Seven Hills	Talbert House
Neighborhood Council	

***Civic Infrastructure***

Bishop Michael E.	Terry Grundy
Dantley	United Way and
Christ Emmanuel	Community Chest
Christian Fellowship	

### Other Planning Meetings

As part of preparing the Cincinnati Empowerment Zone Strategic Plan and securing resource commitments, members of the Community Partners Group and City staff met with numerous stakeholder groups. These meetings are detailed in the Appendix and include:

- Cincinnati City Council
- Uptown Collaborative
- Community Foundations
- Lenders
- State and local elected officials

### Establishing the Governing Structure

As part of the strategic planning process, an Empowerment Zone Governance Planning Group (GPG) was formed to develop a governance structure and assessment system that can effectively direct, oversee and monitor the EZ program on behalf of community residents, and can do so upon designation. The GPG was comprised of six community representatives and five representatives of other community stakeholder groups.

#### ***Empowerment Zone Governance Planning Group***

- Jerry Pryor, Avondale Community Council
- Marjorie Klusmeyer, Clifton Heights/Fairview Heights Community Council
- Rebecca Crouse, Mt. Auburn Community Council
- Jeff Raser, Walnut Hills Area Council
- Jim King, Community Redevelopment Group
- Bishop Michael E. Dantley, Christ Emmanuel Christian Fellowship
- John F. Shirey, City of Cincinnati
- Gene Beaupre, Xavier University
- Walt Flynn, Children's Hospital Medical Center
- Deborah Jimmerson, Greater Cincinnati Housing Alliance
- John Williams, Greater Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce

The GPG met twice to develop a recommended governance structure. This structure was presented to the Community Partners Group at its final meeting. After spirited debate, the GPG reworked their proposal to incorporate the comments they received. The revised governance structure was reviewed and endorsed by the Zone Community Council presidents and became the Cincinnati Empowerment Corporation.

### ***Controversial Topics***

As would be expected with a process that requires a large number of community stakeholders to come together and reach consensus on a complex plan in a short period of time, there were areas of controversy and frustration. Most participants were pleasantly surprised, however, to see the extent to which they were able to work collaboratively to produce a quality product.

The following summarizes the major controversies that arose and their resolution:

#### ***The Zone Boundaries***

This controversy did not involve neighborhoods vying with each other to be included in the Zone. There was agreement from the beginning that the Cincinnati Zone would comprise the nine neighborhoods that came together to form the Empowerment Zone Planning Coalition. At no time during the planning process did other neighborhoods in the City request to be a part of the Zone.

The controversy, instead, was over which census tracts from the nine neighborhoods should be a part of the Zone. The 50,000-population limit meant that parts of some neighborhoods would be left out.

The primary point of contention was whether the census tract in the West End that includes the Lincoln Court HOPE VI project should be a part of the Zone. There were many advocates of including it in the Zone. They noted that this would raise the distress indicators of the Zone and would bring a major commitment of federal and local resources, as well as an innovative housing project, into the Zone boundaries.

Opponents pointed out that there was a great deal of neighborhood opposition to the HOPE VI project because it would result in the displacement of low-income residents. In addition, it was felt that this area was “taken care of” with the large commitment of resources to the project.

In the end, the City left it up to the Community Councils of the nine neighborhoods to make the decision, and they opted to leave the West End census tract where the HOPE VI project was located out of the Zone boundaries. They did agree, however, that it is a potential asset adjacent to the Zone and should be noted as such in the plan.

### ***The Light Rail System***

Throughout the planning process, some Zone residents voiced opposition to the planned light rail system. Based on past experiences with major transportation projects, they are concerned that construction of the light rail and its stations and transfer centers will result in displacement of neighborhood residents and businesses. Some felt so strongly about this that they advocated to have the light rail system removed at a key project in the plan.

After much discussion with other Community Partners, it was agreed that there could be positive impacts from the project, including access to regional employment and services and spin-off economic development in the Zone. To assure that their concerns were noted, however, they asked that the issue of displacement be highlighted in the plan as an important value of Zone residents. In addition, the EZ Rider II program incorporates Zone resident involvement in the planning process to assure that the project does not have negative impacts on the Zone.

### ***The Governing Structure***

There were several concerns raised during the design of the governance structure. Zone representatives wanted to assure that the body and its work would be community-driven, with resources directly benefiting the Zone. The business community wanted a mechanism to assure that the governance structure was accountable and that resources would produce

true outcomes. Some Community Partners were concerned that, even with a large board, the participation level would decline and a small group would make decisions. These concerns were resolved through the final structure and principles of the Cincinnati Empowerment Corporation, which included the following features:

- **Community driven**—A majority of the board members must either reside or work in the Zone or be affiliated with a business or entity with a facility in the Zone.
- **Accountability**—A detailed performance assessment and fiscal accountability system is a part of the governance structure.
- **Super majority decision making**—Either 70% of the Board members in attendance or 17 members of the Board (whichever is larger) is required for affirmative action, and a formal meeting requires a 60% quorum

### ***Putting It Together***

Cincinnati’s EZ effort started with a group of concerned neighborhood residents. This application and strategic plan is a product of their inspiration, as well as the hard work of hundreds of Cincinnatians across the region.

Their work was not completed with the signing of the Declaration of Empowerment at the final Community Partners meeting. Although the group endorsed the proposed plan and governance structure, much work was still required to “flesh out” the initiatives and to secure local resource commitments for implementation. That process involved dozens of people from across the community and introduced many more to the effort as they were directly solicited to support initiatives within the plan.

City government staff played a crucial role in these efforts. They coordinated the final development and refinement of the 24 programs presented in the plan. Importantly, they did not do this in isolation, but consistent with the EZ planning process, as part of an overall community effort to develop this plan. For example, the final components of the Sector-Based Training

initiative—action steps, outputs/outcomes, and budget—were developed by Cincinnati State, the implementing partner. Similarly, the Urban Workforce Exchange Program was further developed and refined by The Urban League of Greater Cincinnati.

Finally, as noted earlier, the outpouring of support from across the community for this EZ effort has been unprecedented. Not only has the process catalyzed the involvement of hundreds of people of different ethnicity, ages, genders, socio-economic status and geographic areas of residence, it has also generated a significant commitment of financial resources for implementing the plan. It also has captured the interest of the local press, which has resulted in numerous articles in local newspapers, several of which did not just report on the local process, but explored the benefits associated with designation as evidenced by the work of communities in Round I.

Perhaps the most significant outcome of this strategic planning has been the respect and trust that has been engendered among the various stakeholders involved in this process. Cincinnati took the strategic planning process seriously, crafting an inclusive and participatory process that provided people with numerous opportunities for participation and input, not just a chance to comment at a public hearing. As a result, neighborhood residents sat at the same table with corporate executives to agree upon values, goals and a vision, as well as the specifics of program initiatives and the governance structure.

At the end of this first step of a long-term commitment to revitalizing the inner-city neighborhoods of Cincinnati, the community is much richer for this effort. It also is prepared to take the next step and implement an Empowerment Zone designation.